

# The Mau Mau War: British Counterinsurgency in Colonial Kenya

A Monograph

by

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## **Abstract**

The Mau Mau War: British Counterinsurgency in Colonial Kenya, by Maj William B. Pittman, 52 pages.

The Mau Mau Rebellion was a mid-twentieth century counterinsurgency campaign that pitted a modern and highly mobile army against a larger, but more poorly resourced and organized, indigenous insurrection. The war transpired wholly within central Kenya where political and economically disenfranchised members of the Kikuyu tribe rebelled against British colonial rule. The British operational approach unfolded in four sequential stages: initial operations in tribal reserve areas where insurgents enjoyed safehavens, the clearing of Nairobi, supplemental operations in the tribal reserve areas, and finally, clearing and securing forest areas where the remnants of the insurgency withdrew to after their safehavens in the tribal reserves were seized. This study argues British counterinsurgency operations were successful militarily in terms of arranging operations and lines of operation/lines of effort, but unsuccessful morally, militarily, and politically in terms of undesired effects. Colonial officials—both military and civilian—destroyed the Mau Mau movement by arranging operations that isolated insurgent fighters from their support base amongst the Kikuyu population. The British isolated the insurgency by conducting military and political operations arranged both sequentially and simultaneously. Planners and officials organized the counterinsurgency along one central line of operation: destroying the insurgent gangs. The British supported this central line of operation with four complimentary lines of effort: containing the resistance, isolating the civilian population, implementing political reforms, and optimizing joint security operations. While leaders in Kenya demonstrated the capacity to plan, arrange, and execute competent security operations, success against the insurgency was only possible because the British also applied a program of politically sanctioned repression. The principal repressive technique used during the war was mass detention. Repression enabled the British to suppress the insurrection but at great cost. The decision to use repressive tactics violated just war tradition, increased Kikuyu sympathy for the Mau Mau movement and ultimately accelerated Kenyan independence.

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## Introduction

On 26 March 1953, upwards of one thousand insurgent fighters armed with ropes, knives, and torches surrounded a cluster of dwellings near Lari, a small village in British Kenya's Rift Valley Province.<sup>1</sup> The residents of this settlement belonged to one of Kenya's many indigenous tribes—the Kikuyu. However, unlike the majority of Kikuyu, the families occupying this particular settlement loyally supported the British colonial order in Kenya. Conversely, the insurgent force that descended upon the loyalist community was Mau Mau, supporters of a rebellion perpetrated against British colonial rule in Kenya. A small band of home guard volunteers was responsible for protecting the loyalist community from potential Mau Mau violence, but on this night, the insurgents cunningly lured the volunteers away.<sup>2</sup> In their absence, insurgent fighters entered the settlement, secured the dwellings shut with rope, and then set the community ablaze. The insurgents immediately attacked the few loyalists who found ways to escape the burning dwellings. In short order, the Mau Mau brutally killed 115 loyalist Kikuyu, mostly women and children, in the early stages of a complex war that was quickly consuming the central regions of Kenya.<sup>3</sup>

This incident, known to history as the Lari Massacre, was a transformational episode in the unfolding Mau Mau Rebellion—an anti-colonial war occurring in the midst of Britain's global decolonization process. The war began in October 1952 when Kenya's Colonial Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, imposed a state of emergency in response to the emerging Mau Mau uprising.

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<sup>1</sup> David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the Mau Mau War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 125.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Thomas, *Fight or Flight: Britain, France, and their Roads from Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 228.

<sup>3</sup> William Jackson, *Withdrawal From Empire: A Modern View* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 106.



From the British perspective, the rebellion was a “primitive, irrational attack against the forces of law and order” conducted by one of Kenya’s many tribes.<sup>4</sup> From the Mau Mau perspective, race based political and economic oppression justified war against both the British colonial government and fellow Africans who accepted colonialism.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of cause or culpability, insurgent attacks on both African civilians and European settlers destabilized central Kenya, compelling Britain’s Middle East Land Forces Command to augment colonial security forces with regular army formations.<sup>6</sup> The first months of the Emergency were noteworthy for Britain’s tepid and lethargic operational response. Colonial government and military leaders had a poor understanding of the environment and problems facing the joint military-civilian security forces. Accordingly, colonial officials adopted a defensive posture as leaders improved security capacities, endeavored to understand the environment, and determined how best to reassert control. Matters changed radically after the Lari Massacre.

The Lari Massacre was a significant event for two reasons. First, this incident, along with a relatively small number of high profile Mau Mau atrocities perpetrated against European settlers engendered hysterical passions among the settler community and some segments of the colonial government.<sup>7</sup> While insurgent activity was horrific, the settler community, an interest group that enjoyed wildly disproportionate political influence with the colonial government

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 89.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), 22-24, 152.

<sup>6</sup> In 1952, command and control of military operations in Kenya and Britain’s East African colonies fell under the British Middle East Land Forces headquartered in Cairo, Egypt. As the Mau Mau Emergency intensified, the War Office inaugurated a new East Africa Command headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya to improve unity of effort. See Huw Bennett, *Fighting Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, 87-95.

administration, sensationalized these events and used them to dehumanize the Kikuyu.<sup>8</sup> This dehumanization process colored opinion of Kenya's political elite and paved the way for brutal political repression that would develop in response to the rebellion. The Lari Massacre was important because it marked a turning point in the war. The scale and brutality of the Lari Massacre made clear for all to witness that initial emergency responses were woefully inadequate. Clearly, the initial operational response adopted by the colony failed to deny freedom of movement to large Mau Mau formations. Worse, the colony demonstrated that it could not protect the loyalist population. These conditions and factors coalesced, prompting British Government officials to reframe their view of the war. Ultimately, Lari allowed the colonial government to change course from a defensive and limited counterinsurgency approach to an aggressive, offensive approach. Before this monograph examines the particulars of Britain's reframed counterinsurgency approach, it is necessary to first explore the war itself.

The Mau Mau Rebellion was a complex struggle that comprised two interconnected conflicts.<sup>9</sup> The first conflict was an intra-tribal feud between factions of the Kikuyu people—Kenya's largest ethnic group. University of Warwick Assistant Professor of African History Daniel Branch argues that this aspect of the rebellion reached civil war proportions.<sup>10</sup> Disagreements over how best to achieve political and economic reforms for Kenya's African population triggered intra-Kikuyu violence and divided the tribe into moderate and radical factions. The moderate faction comprised that portion of the Kikuyu who supported British colonial rule. A collection of chiefs appointed by the British led the moderate ranks of the Kikuyu. These chiefs and their followers received economic benefits in return for their loyalty

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<sup>8</sup> Elkins, 48-49.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

and, as a result, emerged as a privileged segment of Kikuyu society. Those benefiting from their close relationship with the British preferred a non-violent approach to political reform in Kenya. Those who did not benefit from the arrangement formed the radical faction of the Kikuyu that preferred a militant approach to achieving political concessions from the British. The struggle between these factions grew bloody in the summer and fall of 1952 when the radical camp launched a terror campaign against loyalist Kikuyu who refused to reject British rule. Colonial authorities in Kenya labeled those who participated in the revolt “the Mau Mau.”<sup>11</sup>

The second conflict comprised within the rebellion was the general uprising by radical Kikuyu against British colonial authority. Estimates suggest as much as ninety percent of the Kikuyu population initially supported the anti-colonial insurgency.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the Kikuyu, some members of the neighboring Embu and Meru tribes also supported the insurgency (see figure 1).<sup>13</sup> In short, the Mau Mau rebelled against British authoritarianism and economic injustices stemming from land dispossession.<sup>14</sup> Early insurgent operations focused on spreading the movement by assassinating Kikuyu loyalists in hopes that terror attacks would stimulate recruiting and unite all Kikuyu against the British. On a much smaller scale, insurgents also

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<sup>11</sup> The origin and meaning of “Mau Mau” are uncertain. One account suggests that Mau Mau is a Kikuyu figure of speech that translates to “greedy eaters.” The reference to eating relates to the ritual eating of goat meat which new initiates into the Mau Mau ranks were made to consume as a symbolic act during oathing ceremonies. In this sense, the label Mau Mau was a derogatory insult. Kikuyu did not refer to themselves as Mau Mau. See John Newsinger, *British Counter-insurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 63; Branch, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Newsinger, 68.

<sup>13</sup> Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 560.

<sup>14</sup> Elkins, 12-15, 152.

attacked European settlers and their property.<sup>15</sup> The combination of intra-Kikuyu fighting and Mau Mau attacks on the settler population reached a tipping point in September 1952 when Baring assessed the uprising had the potential to spillover to other tribes—an outcome which would existentially threaten the colonial enterprise in Kenya.<sup>16</sup> This threat prompted the state of emergency and triggered the War Office to deploy regular army formations to Kenya.

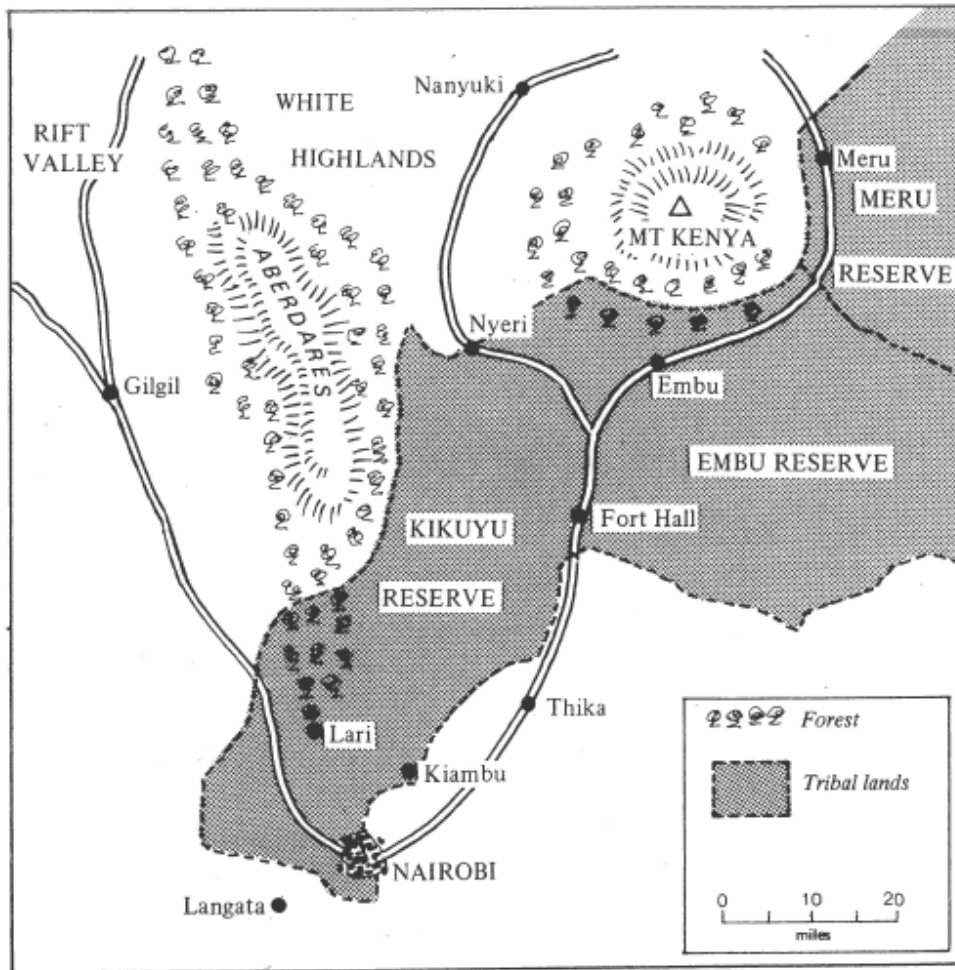


Figure 1. Tribal Reserve Areas

Source: William Jackson, *Withdrawal From Empire: A Military View* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Roads to Decolonization 1918-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 190.

Insurgent violence and British counterinsurgency operations transpired wholly within central Kenya, specifically, within the city of Nairobi, Central Province, and Rift Valley Province (see figure 2). Central Province and Rift Valley Province consisted of Kikuyu reserve lands, white settler lands, and unpopulated forest highlands. In the early years of the war, the British counterinsurgency response focused on building combat power, re-establishing security in the reserves and settled areas, and clearing the Mau Mau from Nairobi. In the later years of the war, the British response focused on clearing insurgents from the forest regions of central Kenya and isolating fighters from support within the Kikuyu population. This later period is associated with controversial measures employed by the British to defeat the Mau Mau including mass internment in detention camps where acts of torture and rape were commonplace.<sup>17</sup> Atrocities, including torture and indiscriminate murder, were also committed in the early part of the conflict when command and control over colonial security forces was immature.<sup>18</sup> The combination of completely executed military operations and political repression coalesced to destroy the Mau Mau movement thus allowing the British to lift the Emergency in 1960.

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<sup>17</sup> Ben Macintyre, "Government to Pay Mau Mau £14m Compensation over Torture Shame," *The Times*, 6 June 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, 192-193.

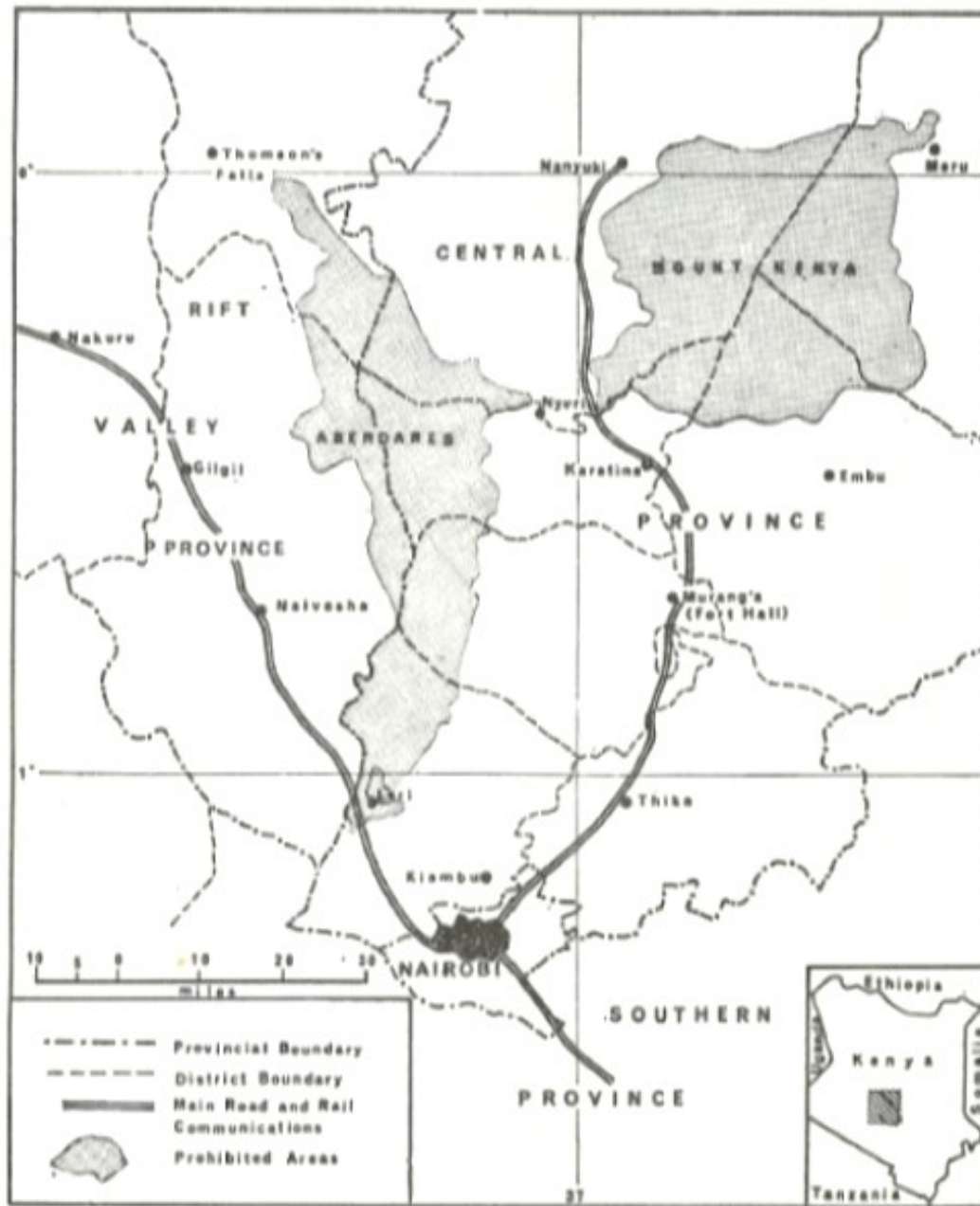


Figure 2. British Area of Operations: Mau Mau Emergency

Source: Anthony Clayton, *Counter-Insurgency in Kenya* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1976).

Counter-Mau Mau operations lasted from the inauguration of the Emergency in 1952 through 1956 when military operations ceased. The response to the insurgency was a whole of

government approach involving military, economic, information, and diplomatic levers of power. Accordingly, the British Government, vice the British Army alone, was responsible for managing the Emergency.<sup>19</sup> Britain's Colonial and War Offices in London supervised the overall response and established policy. Colonial government officials in Kenya, and regular British Army leaders, planned and executed counterinsurgency from Nairobi. Parallel arrangements consisting of colonial and military leaders existed at the provincial and district levels of government. To enhance jointness and overcome bureaucratic inefficiencies, British leaders streamlined command and control by establishing a War Council in 1954.<sup>20</sup> The principal British leaders during the Emergency were Colonial Governor Baring and General George Erskine who commanded British forces as director of operations from June of 1953 through May 1955. The overall response to the rebellion consisted of two simultaneous campaigns.<sup>21</sup> The first campaign was a military effort orchestrated by senior officers of the regular British Army. This aspect of the response lasted approximately four years and involved the conventional employment of counterinsurgency measures. The second campaign was a political effort orchestrated by the colonial administration of Kenya, specifically the colonial governor and the colony's Legislative Council. Colonial politics and "virulent racism" dominated the political campaign against rebels.<sup>22</sup> The political

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<sup>19</sup> For the purposes of conciseness, this study uses the expression "British Government" as a catchall term meant to encapsulate the executive arm of Parliament—namely the ruling Tory ministers—and executive agencies that carried out state policy on Parliament's behalf. Accordingly, "British Government" in this context also includes the Colonial and War Offices in London, as well as their agents in Kenya Colony—the Kenyan colonial government administration and British Army formations deployed to support the colonial government.

<sup>20</sup> Prior to the creation of the War Council, two separate organizations administered the Mau Mau campaign: an Emergency Committee, which focused on governance, and a Director of Operations Committee, which focused on security operations. The War Council combined these functions to achieve unity of purpose and unity of command. See George Erskine, "Kenya—Mau Mau," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* 101, no. 601 (February 1956), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Elkins, xi-xii.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

campaign lasted eight years and involved the highly repressive measures and human rights abuses for which the Mau Mau war is infamous.

The Mau Mau Rebellion, and the British reaction to it, was a complex socio-political event that historians, political scientists, soldiers, and survivors have frequently explored in the years since hostilities ended. Its scholarship generally falls into one of three categories. The first category includes literature that explores Britain's use of repression and considers the conflict from the perspective of the Kikuyu. Of note in this category is Caroline Elkins' 2006 Pulitzer Prize winning *Imperial Reckoning*. Elkins relies on information obtained through victim interviews and government archives to establish British culpability in a campaign defined by the "systematic use of violence" against insurgents and suspected insurgents.<sup>23</sup> David Anderson arrived at similar conclusions in *Histories of the Hanged*.<sup>24</sup> The second category includes older studies that assess the conflict from the British Government's perspective, as opposed to a ground-up analysis that incorporated Kikuyu perspectives. These studies acknowledge the occurrence of some atrocities but generally exonerate the British Government from knowingly condoning repressive activity. Perspectives and conclusions of literature in this category suffer from research conducted before the British Government released archives on the war.<sup>25</sup> Typical studies in this category include Anthony Clayton's *Counter-Insurgency in Kenya*.<sup>26</sup> The final category consists of recent work that acknowledges British repression but explores the role

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<sup>23</sup> Elkins, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, 5-8.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Macintyre, "Britain's Colonial Files to be Released," *The Times*, 6 April 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Clayton, *Counter-Insurgency in Kenya* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1976).



loyalist Kikuyu played in the cycles of violence that occurred during the insurgency. Daniel Branch's *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya* is of particular value in this category.<sup>27</sup>

The historiography of the Mau Mau Rebellion has benefited from recent British archival disclosures that cement the government's culpability in atrocities committed against Kikuyu supporters of the insurgency.<sup>28</sup> The British Government's complicity with wartime atrocities is no longer a matter of debate. What remains of interest to operational planners is how the British approached the insurgency at the operational level of war. The British have a rich history of counterinsurgency experience: Malaya, Kenya, Ireland, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Counterinsurgency studies on Malaya, Northern Ireland, and even Afghanistan are abundant. Military commentators have focused much less attention on Kenya, presumably because of the colonial government's nefarious political conduct. Accordingly, this monograph aims to explore the effectiveness of operational level decisions and planning during the insurgency. With a prospering literature on the political aspects of the war, and considering recent archival disclosures, how did counterinsurgency operations, and the use of excessive force, affect Britain's short- and long-term interests in Kenya? The British spent four years and millions of pounds suppressing the tribal insurgency.<sup>29</sup> How effective was Britain's response to the Mau Mau Rebellion?

While an objective survey of available evidence clearly establishes British complicity in the use of highly repressive measures during the Emergency, the counterinsurgency response to the uprising was successful in the sense that security operations first contained, and then defeated,

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<sup>27</sup> Branch, 8-20.

<sup>28</sup> Bennett, 160-228.

<sup>29</sup> Brendon, 570.

the militant gangs.<sup>30</sup> The purpose of this monograph is not to justify Britain's combined military/political response to the uprising—there is no defense for Britain's detainee treatment record, the sheer scale of internment practiced during the Emergency, or the disregard for even the crudest notions of due process. Rather, the purpose of this monograph is to impartially analyze Britain's overall response to the Emergency from a counterinsurgency perspective in order to distil an understanding of how militant insurgents in Kenya were defeated. An objective review of events demonstrates that tactical level military and police operations isolated insurgents from their support base among the Kikuyu people. This outcome fatally weakened the insurgency's cohesiveness and forced them to seek safe haven in the forest highlands—an unpopulated area where the British Army easily conducted conventional military operations to locate and destroy militant rebels. An objective review of events also yields the undeniable reality that the British were only able to sustain military gains because of the political decision to oversee the long-term detention of hundreds of thousands of Kikuyu. While this expedient enabled the British to reassert control in central Kenya, it ruined lives, disgraced the British Empire, and ultimately accelerated Kenyan independence. Consequently, this monograph argues British counterinsurgency operations were successful militarily in terms of arranging operations and lines of operation/lines of effort, but unsuccessful morally, militarily, and politically in terms of undesired effects.

### **Arranging Operations**

The Mau Mau attack on the loyalist settlement at Lari was successful because the colonial government was incapable of arranging effective operations at the outset of the Emergency. British authorities had an incomplete understanding of the operational environment

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<sup>30</sup> This monograph uses the term gang to connote a small tactical formation of militant wing Mau Mau fighters because it conforms to terminology used by the British during the war. See Erskine, 16.

when the Colonial Office authorized the state of emergency in October 1952. Although violence was increasing and reports of large-scale Mau Mau oathing practices indicated an extensive insurgent threat, authorities knew little about the substance of the movement's leadership, organization, or intentions.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the British lacked security force strength and visionary leaders.<sup>32</sup> Lacking leadership, manpower, and a comprehensive plan, the British focused on establishing security in the areas occupied by European settlers. This approach benefited the settlers but exposed the loyalist Kikuyu to insurgent violence. These factors directly contributed to a security environment that permitted Mau Mau fighters to build strength and operate with impunity throughout central Kenya. How did colonial authorities overcome initial conditions to improve security and end the rebellion? This section explores that question by assessing the operational environment and reviewing contemporaneous notions of counterinsurgency history, theory, and doctrine. This section concludes with an analysis of how colonial leaders, most notably Erskine and Baring, overcame initial conditions to successfully arrange operations that eventually led to the destruction of the insurgency.

Like all leaders in times of crisis, British officials in Kenya at the outset of the Emergency were challenged to determine how best to reach desired end state conditions. From London's perspective, Kenya was a concern but in the context of Britain's global decolonization process, the Emergency was far from a national priority. Concurrent with the war efforts in Kenya, the Colonial Office managed major conflicts in Egypt, Malaya, and Cyprus. Internationally, Britain's top strategic priorities included the Soviet Union and European

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<sup>31</sup> Mau Mau leaders initiated insurgents and supporters into the Mau Mau fraternity using oathing practices. This method was a psychological play on Kikuyu loyalties because oathing practices were a cultural phenomenon central to Kikuyu identity. For example, Kikuyu used oaths to solemnize marriage and contracts. See Branch, 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (Boston, MA: Faber and Faber, 1986), 201.

cooperation. Domestically, Britain's economy was still recovering from the Second World War. Under these circumstances, British East Africa was a second tier priority for the Empire. Accordingly, the British Government left the Emergency as a local matter for the colonial government to resolve.<sup>33</sup> National level guidance was concise: end the terror and address the underlying tensions that motivated the Kikuyu to rebel.<sup>34</sup> To enable these objectives, the British Government deployed a number of regular army battalions to Kenya to support colonial government operations. Nevertheless, the responsibility for managing the war rested solely with the colonial administration and British Army officers deployed to assist the colony.

The operational environment presented two fundamental problems for British colonial leaders to manage. First, the British had to suppress the insurgent terror campaign. Mau Mau operations attempted to overthrow the colonial order by attacking both loyal Kikuyu and European settlers. These activities destabilized central Kenya and threatened to engulf the entire colony in general revolt. Second, the British had to address the causal conditions that drove the Kikuyu to violence. The principal drivers of tension were land dispossession and discriminatory political practices. To resolve these problems, the British had to manage the aspirations of three competing interest groups: the white settlers, the loyalist Kikuyu, and the discontented Kikuyu who formed the Mau Mau ranks.

European settlers began to immigrate to Kenya in the late nineteenth century in search of entrepreneurial opportunities and to establish grand estates.<sup>35</sup> Early imperial policy made

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas, 221.

<sup>34</sup> Hyam, 192.

<sup>35</sup> White immigrant settlers were always a small minority of Kenya's total population. By one estimate, the settler population numbered 29,000 at the outset of the Mau Mau Rebellion while the Kikuyu numbered 1.4 million. Kenya's total African population was approximately 5 million. See Bennett, 8.

affordable land available to settlers. The goal of this policy was to create a commercial base in East Africa to support a rail project connecting the Port of Mombasa on Kenya's Indian Ocean coast with Uganda.<sup>36</sup> At this time, a series of misfortunes that befell Kenya in the 1890s caused the Kikuyu to vacate great tracts of fertile land.<sup>37</sup> Imperialists obtained the vacant land—later dubbed the “White Highlands”—from Kikuyu leaders who believed their transaction amounted to a lease, as opposed to freehold conveyance.<sup>38</sup> Once acquired, the imperialists parceled out the land to European immigrants in hopes that settler enterprise would result in tax revenue.

The White Highlands proved especially attractive to settlers because of its proximity to Nairobi. Settlers flocked to central Kenya to take advantage of new opportunities. Imperial policy, misfortune, and economics coalesced to cause the colonial government to establish Kikuyu Reserve areas. While approximately twelve percent of the Kikuyu population lived within the White Highlands as tenant labor, the majority of Kikuyu lived within the Kikuyu Reserves.<sup>39</sup> The settlers never sought to integrate the native population and Kenyan society fragmented on racial lines. The settlers soon established wealth and power that separated them from the indigenous African population economically and politically. From the beginning, the settlers had a vastly disproportionate voice in political matters. The settlers used this influence to safeguard their privileged status at the expense of the Kikuyu. The origin of the rebellion was land availability. Reserve areas were not large enough to accommodate the needs of the Kikuyu

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<sup>36</sup> Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 398.

<sup>37</sup> These misfortunes included drought, famine, a locust plague, a rinderpest outbreak, and a smallpox epidemic. Collectively, these events reduced the Kikuyu population by as much as 50% and affected their cultivation practices. See Derwent Whittlesey, “Kenya, the Land and Mau Mau,” *Foreign Affairs* 32, no. 1 (October 1953): 84-85.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Dewar, *Brush Fire Wars: Minor Campaigns of the British Army since 1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 52.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, 23-24.

population. The problem worsened when a population boom occurred in the 1930s and 1940s. The resulting demographic pressure threatened settler privilege and contributed to the fracturing of Kikuyu society as the British played factions off against each other to maintain control of central Kenya.<sup>40</sup>

In the late 1940s, the Kikuyu began to splinter into moderate and radical factions. The moderate faction included those Kikuyu who directly benefited from the colonial arrangement—namely certain clans led by British appointed chiefs or headmen.<sup>41</sup> The moderate faction also included Kikuyu who adopted the Christian faith.<sup>42</sup> Moderate Kikuyu generally accepted a gradualist approach to reform. Moderate political objectives included avoiding war and maintaining their privileged arrangement with colonial authorities—specifically access to land and trading licenses. The radical faction comprised disaffected Kikuyu activists who attempted to achieve reform through more direct political means. The radical faction originally worked through the Kenya African Union, a pan-Kenyan organization led by Kikuyu leader Jomo Kenyatta. The Kenya African Union, founded in 1946, organized civil disobedience and lobbied the colonial government for political reform.<sup>43</sup> When progress failed to materialize, Kenya African Union supporters grew disillusioned and a militant offshoot, the Mau Mau, evolved. The Kenya African Union and the Mau Mau shared the political objective of ending colonial rule but the Mau Mau adopted violence to attain through force what the moderate party could not achieve politically.

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<sup>40</sup> Brendon, 551.

<sup>41</sup> Branch, 29-30.

<sup>42</sup> Bennett, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Lapping, 406.

Increasingly, the colonial government found itself officiating between settler interests and Kikuyu interests. Balancing settler influence with the royally sanctioned obligation to promote the wellbeing of Kenya's native tribes challenged the colonial government. Although most of Kenya's tribes did not challenge colonial authority, the Kikuyu had legitimate grievances that required redress. The rebellion was thus the outgrowth of the colonial government's failure to correct the land dispossession problem and for failing to grant the Kikuyu meaningful political influence in colonial affairs. During the initial period of the Emergency, lasting from October 1952 to the spring of 1953, the British were on the defensive as they lacked adequate manpower and leadership to effectively manage the rebellion. The British Government addressed these shortcomings and thoroughly assessed the operational environment after the Lari Massacre.

The operational environment consisted of four principal participants: the British, the settler community, the loyalist Kikuyu, and the rebel Mau Mau. British end states as defined by the Tory Government in London were to end the violence and address political discrimination that alienated portions of the Kikuyu tribe. The basic problems for colonial authorities involved containing the rebellion, protecting the loyalists, defeating the insurgency, and implementing political reforms to assuage legitimate grievances within Kikuyu society. To resolve these problems, the colonial government collaborated with security forces—imperfectly at first—to design an operational approach to the rebellion. British authorities in London never authorized Kenya to declare martial law. Accordingly, Baring remained in overall control of the colony's response. Initial conditions of note from the British perspective were deficiencies in force strength, military leadership, and intelligence. The British overcame these deficiencies by constructing a formidable security force apparatus consisting of police, police auxiliaries, regular army brigades, and colonial military regiments. Leadership improved in 1953 when Major

General William Hinde and General Erskine, the individual who subsequently led the counterinsurgency, arrived to Kenya.<sup>44</sup>

From the insurgent perspective, initial conditions of note included a strong fraternity of support linking leadership and supplies in Nairobi with fighting squads that roamed the Kikuyu Reserves and forested areas on Central and Rift Valley Provinces. While the Mau Mau had numbers on their side, they lacked modern weapons and the sophistication to coordinate operations. Organizationally, the insurgent movement consisted of militant and passive wings.<sup>45</sup> Militant wing members were the insurgents, organized into fighting gangs, who conducted operations. Passive wing members were sympathizers who supported the militant wing with recruiting, intelligence, and supplies. The vast majority of Mau Mau belonged to the passive wing. Operationally, the insurgents conducted a terror campaign against loyalist Kikuyu to deter loyalism and to delegitimize colonial authority. With the operational environment framed, and with new leadership in place, British planners began arranging counterinsurgency operations in mid-1953.

Despite the colonial government's inconspicuous response to the initial phase of the war, British planners had a tremendous legacy of experience managing insurrections to draw upon. This of course was because of the sheer scale of the British Empire. The British spent most of the century preceding the outbreak of the rebellion fighting small wars across the globe. This experience provided a rich heritage of counterinsurgency history, theory, and doctrine. While the British fought numerous small wars in Afghanistan, India, Sudan, Egypt, South Africa, Ireland, Palestine, and Malaya in the years preceding the rebellion, the Second Boer War and the Malaya Emergency likely had the greatest impact on the Kenyan Emergency. The Second Boer War

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<sup>44</sup> Bennett, 17; Branch, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-gangs* (London: Barrie and Rocklife, 1960), 15.



(1899-1902) witnessed the employment of population control methods that included internment, interconnected security outposts, resource control, and massive sweep operations—techniques that influenced later stabilization practices.<sup>46</sup> The British experience during the Malaya Emergency (1948-1960) also yielded a wealth of relevant counterinsurgency knowledge. The most noteworthy operational level innovation developed during the Malaya Emergency was the experiment with villagization. Villagization, conceived of by Director of Operations during the Malaya Emergency, Sir Harold Briggs, involved civilian population resettlement into villages where colonial authorities could provide security and social services.<sup>47</sup> The goal was to isolate insurgents from potential support networks. Briggs also developed novel command and control structures unifying the efforts of civil and military operations.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the Malayan experience introduced the basic strategy solution of implementing political and economic reforms while “searching for the military means of victory.”<sup>49</sup> Collectively, these counterinsurgency techniques were dubbed “the Briggs Plan.”<sup>50</sup>

Formal counterinsurgency theory distilled from Britain’s vast colonial experience materialized in two principal works: *Small Wars* by Colonel C.E. Callwell and *Imperial Policing* by Major General Charles W. Gwynn. *Small Wars*, first published in 1896 but reprinted in updated editions in the early twentieth century, was likely the first comprehensive study of

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<sup>46</sup> Crawshaw, Michael, *The Evolution of British COIN* (London: Ministry of Defense, 2011), accessed 4 March 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-evolution-of-british-coin>, 7-8.

<sup>47</sup> David French, *Army Empire and Cold War: The British Army and Military Police 1945-1971* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 115.

<sup>48</sup> Jackson, 89-90.

<sup>49</sup> Hyam, 192.

<sup>50</sup> Newsinger, 49.

counterinsurgency war produced by a British scholar. Huw Bennett, lecturer in international politics at Aberyswerth University, argues that Callwell was the British Army's "most influential and systematic thinker on small wars."<sup>51</sup> In chapter nine of *Small Wars*, Callwell analyzed guerilla warfare and offered thoughts on how best to wage counterinsurgency. Drawing upon notable analogs in history, Callwell suggested the importance of subdividing the area of operations into separate command districts, constantly harassing the enemy, depriving the enemy of access to resources, protecting civilians, and resorting—at times—to "severity."<sup>52</sup> *Imperial Policing*, published in 1934, built upon Callwell's work. Specifically, Gwynn explored the military's role when called upon to support civil authorities during times of insurrection. Gwynn's work examined the general nature of rebellion and suggested the military must only use the "minimum force" necessary when combating insurrection.<sup>53</sup> Gwynn's work also offered a number of principles and doctrines. Of note, Gwynn stressed the necessity of civil-military cooperation, timely and firm action, cultivating neutral and loyal population segments, and the occasional need to employ collective punishment.<sup>54</sup> In addition to Callwell and Gwynn, Jominian theory continued to influence British doctrine and operations. Specifically, the military preference for the offense, massing forces, organizing operations on lines of operations, and deploying forces on decisive points remained enshrined in British military thinking during the Mau Mau Rebellion.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bennett, 90.

<sup>52</sup> C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (1896; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 125-149.

<sup>53</sup> Charles W. Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1934), 1-9.

<sup>54</sup> Gwynn, 10-23.

<sup>55</sup> Henri-Antoine Jomini, *The Art of War: A New Edition with Appendices and Maps*, trans. G.H. Mendell and W.P. Graighill (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1862), 70.

Despite the extensiveness of British counterinsurgency experience and theoretical contributions by Callwell and Gwynn, formal counterinsurgency doctrine available to planners during the Mau Mau Rebellion was limited. The War Office issued two publications that likely influenced operations in Kenya. *Imperial Policing and Duties in Aid of the Civil Power*, published in 1949, summarized contemporaneous thought on the military's role in supporting civil authorities during times of insurrection. This pamphlet offers guidance on legal aspects of imperial policing including the ironic admonition that "no more force shall be applied than the situation demands."<sup>56</sup> This pamphlet also offers commentary on the nature of the civil-military relationship, the importance of operational security, and the role of the commander during counterinsurgency operations.<sup>57</sup> The final section of this publication includes tactical level doctrinal guidance on proper techniques to conduct cordon and search operations.<sup>58</sup> The War Office also published several editions of *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya* during the mid-1950s. This work mostly catalogued relevant combat tactics used during the Malayan Emergency but also contained information on enemy formations, emergency regulations, and the Briggs Plan.<sup>59</sup>

The British Government failed to develop a firm strategy and operational approach that comprehensively addressed the insurgent threat until British leaders in London reassessed events in the wake of the Lari Massacre. This reframing of the situation in Kenya prompted the War Office to dispatch General Erskine to Kenya where he assumed the office of director of

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<sup>56</sup> War Office, *Imperial Policing and Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* (London: The War Office, 1949), 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-16.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-44.

<sup>59</sup> War Office, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, 3rd ed. (1958, repr., St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2006).

operations.<sup>60</sup> In the months preceding Erskine's arrival in June 1953, Major General Hinde was the senior military officer in Kenya. Hinde, who arrived in January 1953, was personal staff officer to Baring—an arrangement that accentuated the primacy of civilian leadership in the early days of the Emergency. In this position, Hinde only had an advisory role in planning because by law, Baring was commander-in-chief of security forces.<sup>61</sup> Baring's failure to adequately devise a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy prompted Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir John Harding, to intervene. During a visit in February 1953, Harding assessed the situation and concluded a more robust regular Army presence was required to address the rebellion.<sup>62</sup> Harding convinced Prime Minister Churchill and Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton, that the situation in Kenya warranted reform. Consequently, the Tory Government selected Erskine, a full general, to assume the role of director of operations.<sup>63</sup> Harding also authorized the deployment of additional army battalions. Locally, the colonial government made other command and control reforms. The effect of these reforms created a temporary system of colonial administration where the governor and the director of operations were more or less co-equal, each representing their respective interests in an Emergency Committee. This arrangement allowed Baring to focus on governance and Erskine to focus on military matters.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Sir Harold Briggs, who led counterinsurgency efforts in Malaya, conceptualized the post of Director of (Emergency) Operations. The Director of Operations was atop a Brigg's designed command structure implemented to address the insurgent threat in Malaya. Major General Hinde implemented an analogous model in Kenya in early 1953. For more, see Jackson, 89, 105; Bennet, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Clayton, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Jackson, 105-106.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>64</sup> In point of fact, the Emergency Committee proved unwieldy. In 1954, the Colonial Office authorized reforms that replaced the Emergency Committee with a War Council. By

The arrival of Erskine and the accompanying structural reforms marked the end of the conflict's first phase, which lasted from the declaration of emergency in October 1952 until June 1953. The initial phase was largely directionless and assumed a generally defensive nature. Erskine's arrival marked the beginning of a second phase. An offensive spirit and expertly arranged operations were characteristic of the war's second phase.<sup>65</sup> Under the guidance of new leaders, British planners arranged operations sequentially and simultaneously. Erskine and Baring's collaboration allowed the British to regain the initiative in Kenya by effectively integrating military and political levers of power.

Emulating stabilization experience acquired in Malaya, Erskine and Baring focused their efforts on isolating insurgent fighters from their support base—the Kikuyu people.<sup>66</sup> To achieve this objective, the British devised a general concept involving four sequential stages each of which focused on separate decisive points in the campaign. First, the Emergency Committee launched hasty operations in the Kikuyu Reserve areas soon after Erskine arrived. Erskine's intention was to use the regular army offensively to apply pressure against the insurgency and to build tempo while simultaneously expanding the intelligence picture and giving colonial police

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design, the War Council had fewer members. The smaller War Council thus optimized unity of command by removing layers of bureaucracy that complicated planning and decision-making. The War Council also increased the influence of the British Army in colonial matters as the Director of Operations was one of the few principal members of the council. See Bennett, 51-54.

<sup>65</sup> East Africa General Headquarters, *Report of the Commander-In-Chief, East Africa Command, to The Secretary of State for War on the Kenya Emergency: June 1953-May 1955* (Nairobi, Kenya: General Headquarters, East Africa, 1955), 6.

<sup>66</sup> During a November 1955 lecture, former Secretary for the Colonies Oliver Lyttleton explained that the Colonial Office selected General Erskine to assume duties as commander-in-chief because Britain needed a leader who had the right temperament and experience to traverse "difficulties" that arise between "military and civil powers" during an emergency. See Erskine, 11.

organizations time and space to build strength.<sup>67</sup> Second, the joint military-civilian security force cleared Nairobi. The British accomplished this objective in April of 1954 during Operation Anvil when security forces launched a massive cordon and sweep to identify and detain insurgents operating in Nairobi. The net result of Operation Anvil was the detention of 16,500 Kikuyu with suspected links to the Mau Mau movement—an outcome that effectively cut off militant wing fighters operating in the provinces from leadership and resources in Nairobi.<sup>68</sup> The third stage involved security operations in the White Highlands and the Kikuyu Reserves. During this stage of the counterinsurgency, security forces conducted patrols and screening operations to locate rebels. In the White Highland areas, colonial regiments provided physical security to the settler population. In the Kikuyu Reserves, the British implemented a villagization program on a massive scale to separate the Kikuyu population from Mau Mau gangs. This stage comprised several lines of effort and minor operations including Operation Pugilist. Operation Pugilist, conducted immediately following Anvil, focused on clearing the districts in Central and Rift Valley Provinces in closest proximity to Nairobi.<sup>69</sup> Operations during this third stage also forced militant wing insurgents into uninhabited regions including the Aberdare and Mt. Kenya forests. The final stage in Erskine and Baring's sequenced approach involved a series of operations designed to locate and destroy the insurgents sheltered in the forest regions of central Kenya. The majority of operations during this stage involved massive sweeps through the forest areas. Blocking elements supported units conducting the sweeps by engaging any insurgents chased

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<sup>67</sup> Erskine, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Dewar, 56.

<sup>69</sup> Bennett, 26.

from of the forests during the sweeps. Operation Hammer, the clearing of the Aberdare region, was typical of security force activity during this stage.<sup>70</sup>

The first three stages in this sequence worked in concert to isolate insurgents from their support base among the Kikuyu people. British operations during these stages were highly successful and prompted an important cascading effect: an increase in grass root level anti-Mau Mau sentiment among the Kikuyu.<sup>71</sup> This outcome bolstered intelligence collection efforts and allowed the British to dedicate their best units, the regular army battalions, to search and destroy missions in the forest regions.

Within each of the sequential stages described above, the British simultaneously conducted a number of supporting operations. Supporting operations included both military and political lines of effort. Militarily, security forces expanded a Kikuyu Home Guard force and conducted engineering projects including the construction of internment camps and the construction of road networks that provided access to the forest regions. The military also conducted innovative intelligence collection operations that helped to locate and destroy tactical level insurgent leadership. Politically, the colonial government authorized emergency regulations that allowed security forces to engage and detain Kikuyu suspected of supporting the insurgent cause absent of due process protections. The colonial administration also initiated amnesty programs and political reform programs that successfully enticed Kikuyu to support the loyalist faction. These lines of effort directly contributed to the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency. Each is worthy of further examination. Specifics on these lines of effort are the subject of section two of this monograph.

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<sup>70</sup> East Africa General Headquarters, 29-33.

<sup>71</sup> Bennett, 25.

After an initial period of uncoordinated and poorly conceived operations, British forces under Erskine and Baring implemented an operational approach that allowed them to first contain, and then defeat, the insurgency. The operational approach, in part, mimicked practices used during the Second Boer War and the Malaya Emergency. Specifically, the British incorporated a villagization program used in Malaya to isolate insurgents from the population, and sweep operations used in South Africa to disrupt and destroy insurgent gangs. Jominian principles including reliance on the offensive, concentration of forces, and conducting operations against decisive points along lines of operations influenced British operational planning. The next section of this monograph will explore how the British developed a strategy and designed lines of operation/lines of effort to achieve policy aims dictated from national authorities in London.

### **Lines of Operation/Lines of Effort**

The Lari Massacre forced the British Government to focus attention, leadership, and resources on events in Kenya. The murder of 115 loyal Kikuyu tribesman raised questions about whether or not loyalists could depend on the British to protect their physical security. If the Kikuyu lost faith in the British order, the appeal of Mau Mau ideology would grow. The British realized this prospect could tip the scales in favor of the insurgency, a result that would likely fuel nationalist sentiments among all indigenous tribes in Kenya. This section explores how the British authorities recovered from the events of March 1953 to regain the initiative by developing a counterinsurgency strategy. It concludes with an assessment of how Baring and Erskine used lines of operation and lines of effort to build an operational approach that enabled British security forces to achieve policy aims in Kenya.

Government officials at both the national level and colonial levels jointly conceived counter-Mau Mau strategy in the weeks and months following the Lari Massacre. Strategy, according to the British historian B.H. Liddell Hart is, “the art of distributing and applying



military means to fulfil the ends of policy.”<sup>72</sup> In *Strategy, the Indirect Approach*, Liddell Hart argued that a successful strategy depends on the “sound calculation and coordination of the end and the means.”<sup>73</sup> He defined ends in terms of policy objectives and argued that it was the government’s responsibility to “indicate clearly” the nature of a commander’s task.<sup>74</sup> Liddell Hart defined means in terms of capabilities. In addition to ends and means, he also developed the concept of intermediate-ends. Although he did not explicitly define this concept, context suggests intermediate-ends are military objectives or activities that belligerents must pursue to reach their respective policy objectives.<sup>75</sup> In modern military parlance, intermediate-ends are analogous to ways in the ends-ways-means strategy model. Liddle Hart’s theory of strategy is important because he introduced it in the decade preceding the Kenyan Emergency and presumably, it influenced the reasoning and decision-making of British politicians and military leaders prior to, and during, the rebellion.

At the outset of the Mau Mau Rebellion, Tory Government leaders in London including Prime Minister Churchill, Colonial Secretary Lyttleton, and Minister of State for War Antony Head determined policy ends and means while colonial officials established the intermediate-ends. Policy ends during the Emergency were succinct: extinguish the Mau Mau perpetrated state of terror and reduce political tensions that triggered the rebellion.<sup>76</sup> To achieve these aims, the Tory Government authorized a number of means. The War Office deployed regular British Army

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<sup>72</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *The Strategy of Indirect Approach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 187.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-186.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 188.

<sup>76</sup> Hyam, 192.

infantry and engineer formations, Royal Air Force squadrons, and several battalions of Kings African Rifles.<sup>77</sup> In addition to units deployed from outside of Kenya, the colonial government authorized its organic security forces to combat the insurgency. Specifically, colonial police, a newly constituted Kikuyu Home Guard, and two settler defense organizations—the Kenya Police Reserves and the Kenya Regiment—were organized and funded to help regain control of central Kenya.<sup>78</sup> Armed with the ends and the means, military and civilian officials in Kenya collaborated to convert strategic guidance into tangible intermediate-end conditions.

As previously noted, colonial leadership failed to develop a comprehensive approach to manage the Emergency until mid-1953 when Erskine assumed responsibilities as director of operations. This was nine months after Baring announced the state of emergency and more than a year after insurgent violence began to consume central Kenya. Despite the sluggish response in the opening months of the Emergency, Erskine and Baring built upon preliminary security initiatives and introduced a number of new intermediate-ends that worked in concert to contain the rebellion.<sup>79</sup> Analyzed in their totality, British counterinsurgent activities fell into five

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<sup>77</sup> British infantry battalions and the Kings African Rifle battalions were task organized into one of three maneuver brigades: the 39th, the 49th, and the 70th. In total, five Kings African Rifle battalions supported counter-Mau Mau operations in Kenya. Two of the battalions were native to Kenya and thus present prior to the Emergency. Britain summoned the remaining three battalions from Uganda, Tanganyika, and Mauritius after Baring declared the Emergency. See Anderson, 62.

<sup>78</sup> Britain typically used the colonial security organizations to defend those subjects inhabiting the settler highlands and the Kikuyu Reserves freeing the military formations to search for and fight the Mau Mau. The Kikuyu Home Guard was an anti-Mau Mau resistance organization that arose in 1952, but was incrementally expanded by the colonial government to augment military and police forces. Comprised entirely of loyalist Kikuyu tribesmen, the Home Guard played a key role in pacifying the passive wing of the Mau Mau resistance. The colonial administration disestablished the Home Guard late in the conflict on account of widespread corruption and criminal behavior. See Clayton, 28-29.

<sup>79</sup> Lacking good tactical intelligence and an overall strategy, the colonial government focused on establishing security in the areas inhabited by European settlers. Local security forces also launched Operation Jock Scott—a leadership decapitation effort wherein the authorities

intermediate-end objectives. In no particular order, these objectives included containing the resistance, isolating the civil population, destroying militant wing Mau Mau gangs, implementing political reforms, and optimizing joint security operations (see figure 3). While ahistorical in some regards, organizing British activities into this framework permits a concise and thorough visualization of how British officials planned and executed the counterinsurgency campaign in Kenya. These five objectives were also the foundation upon which British planners designed lines of operation/lines of effort as depicted in figure 4.

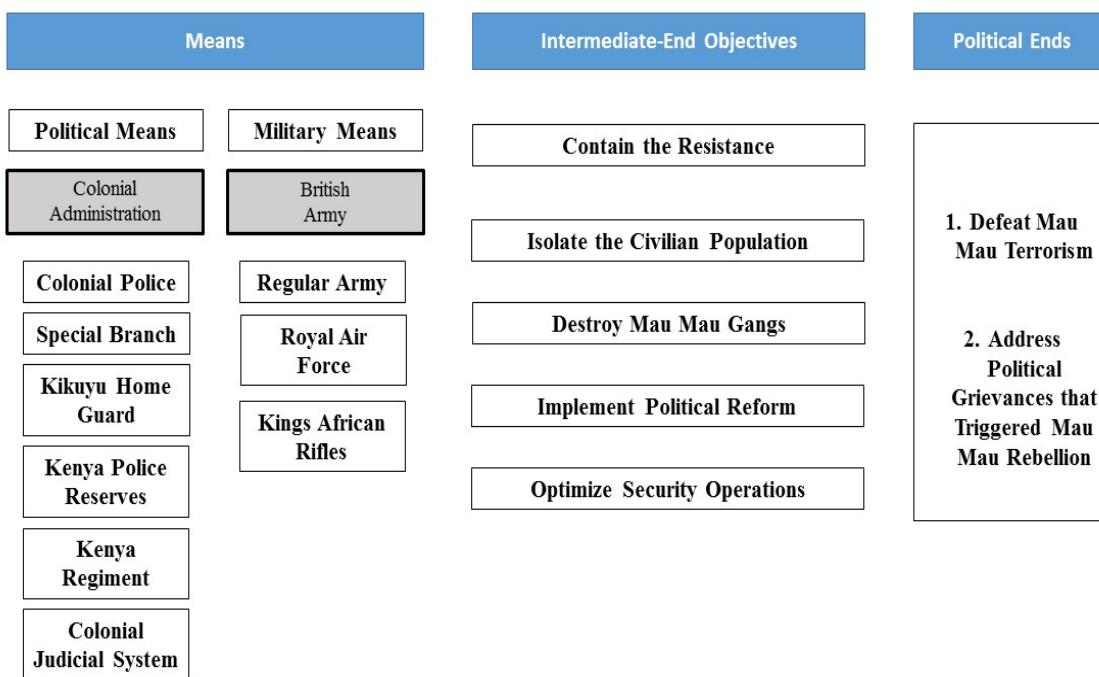


Figure 3. British Counter-Mau Mau Strategy

Source: Created by author.

detained suspected Mau Mau leaders and newspaper publishers suspected of surreptitiously supporting the Mau Mau cause. See Clayton, 21.

Lines of operation thinking has influenced military planning since at least 1766 when Welsh theorist Henry Humphrey Evans Lloyd first introduced the concept.<sup>80</sup> Later, Jomini made the concept famous when he theorized that lines of operation connect “the objective point with the base, either in the offensive or the defensive.”<sup>81</sup> Essentially, lines of operation are physical pathways that an army traverses to get from its point of origin, or base, to its objective, often a decisive point in the area of operations. Lines of operation are tangible because they are associated with geography. The pathway from base to final objective will likely include intermediate tasks the attacking army must achieve before it reaches the final objective point. Such objectives are often locations where the enemy occupies critical terrain or where a pivotal engagement occurs. Jomini suggested that armies could pursue multiple lines of operation to reach their objectives if terrain within the area of operations supported multiple approaches.<sup>82</sup> In this sense, lines of operation are a way to conceptualize and plan the direction and security of an army’s campaign from its origin to its objective.

Panning and visualizing military operations in terms of lines of operation was entrenched in British military thinking long before the rebellion. In *Small Wars*, Callwell wrote on the importance of selecting a well-defined objective to guide operations, and framing operations on “different lines.”<sup>83</sup> Likewise, Liddell Hart used the construct when he advised commanders to select lines of operation that offer “alternative objectives” because doing so places an adversary

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<sup>80</sup> Michael Howard, “Jomini and the Classical Tradition of Military Thought,” in *The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to Captain B.H. Liddell Hart on his Seventieth Birthday* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), 8.

<sup>81</sup> Jomini, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>83</sup> Callwell, 34-37.

into a dilemma.<sup>84</sup> Lines of effort thinking is a complimentary technique planners use to logically organize operations. Like lines of operation, lines of effort link intermediate tasks with an objective. Unlike lines of operation, which are intrinsically tied to physical geography, lines of effort arrange tasks according to “the logic of purpose.”<sup>85</sup> In short, arranging activities on a line of effort involves logically planning the intermediate tasks, or objectives, which an army must achieve before it can realize its military objective. While it is clear that British military officers were familiar with lines of operations thinking during the Emergency, the War Office had not yet established the concept of lines of effort in doctrine. Nevertheless, an objective analysis of the counterinsurgency approach adopted by Erskine and Baring suggests British leaders arranged security activities on both lines of operation and lines of effort in practice. A holistic analysis of counter-Mau Mau campaign activities suggests the British adopted one overarching line of operation reinforced by four supporting lines of effort as the basis of the plan to achieve the political aims (see figure 4). In general, the British Army under Erskine was responsible for execution of the line of operation while both the army and the colonial administration jointly pursued the lines of effort.

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<sup>84</sup> Liddell Hart, 214.

<sup>85</sup> Jack D. Kem, *Planning for Action: Campaign Concepts and Tools* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2013), 157.

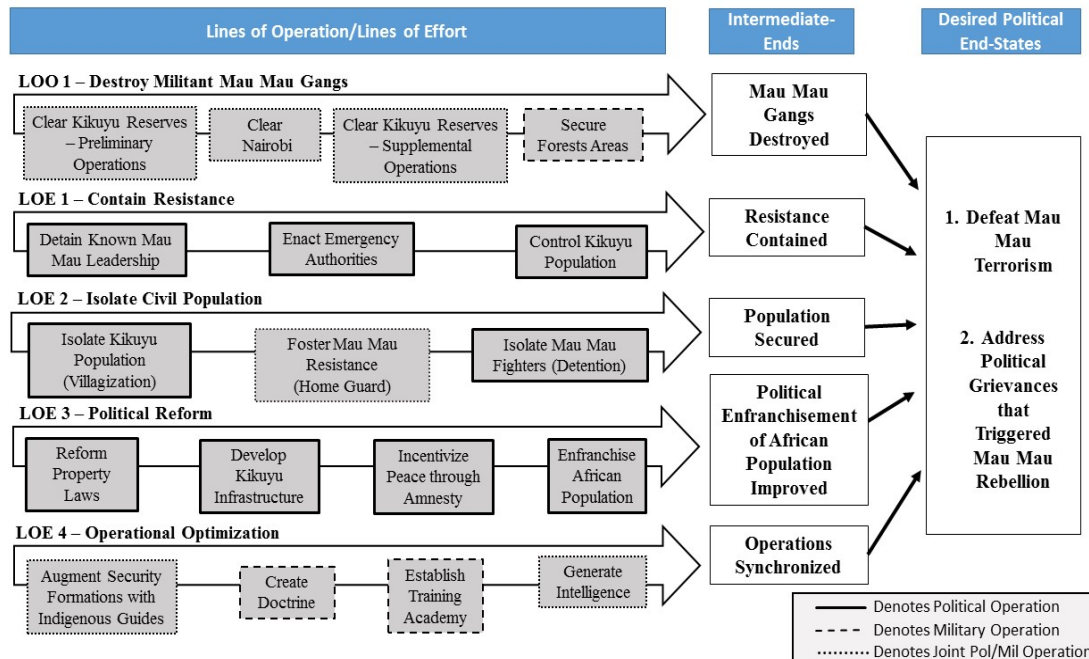


Figure 4. British Operational Approach: Mau Mau Emergency

Source: Created by author.

It is clear from Erskine's November 1954 Royal United Services Institute lecture, that the British Army arranged operations around one sole line of operation.<sup>86</sup> The goal of this line of operation was locating and *destroying the insurgent gangs* destabilizing central Kenya. The British accomplished this goal by isolating militant wing fighters from their support base located within the Kikuyu Reserves and the city of Nairobi. Once the fighters were isolated, security forces conducted sweeps in the uninhabited forest areas (the Aberdares and Mt. Kenya) to destroy the remaining insurgent bands. To summarize, the British line of operation consisted of four successive initiatives that precisely mirrored the sequential arrangement of operations described in section one of this monograph. First, Baring and Erskine organized preliminary counterinsurgent activities in the Kikuyu Reserve areas. Second, British security forces cleared

<sup>86</sup> Erskine, 16.

Nairobi of insurgents and Mau Mau sympathizers during Operation Anvil. Once the British successfully consolidated gains in Nairobi, security forces refocused on a third task, supplementary operations in the Kikuyu Reserves designed to clear them of militant wing fighters. Finally, operations shifted to the Aberdares and Mt. Kenya forest areas where British patrols pursued the last remnants of resistance. This line of operation was the fundamental framework around which the British planned all military, information, and political operations. Erskine and Baring choreographed four reinforcing lines of effort that supported British efforts to locate and destroy militant gangs. These lines of effort overlapped in terms of time, but functioned independently of ground combat operations.

The first and most critical line of effort the British pursued was *containing the resistance*. The goal of this line of effort was to prevent the movement from spreading beyond the Kikuyu regions of Kenya and to halt the growth of the movement within Kikuyu society. Civil authorities within the colonial administration—vice the British Army—managed security objectives in this line of effort. The colonial government began efforts to contain the resistance by arresting known leaders of the insurgent movement. Two early initiatives of note were leadership decapitation and enactment of emergency regulations. The colonial government attempted to decapitate the movement's leadership in the first days of the Emergency during Operation Jock Scott when security forces detained a number of political and media figures suspected of leading the emerging insurgency.<sup>87</sup> Next, the British contained the resistance through a series of emergency power regulations, which the colony enacted concurrently with the declaration of emergency in October 1952. Collectively, the emergency regulations expanded police powers, restricted Kikuyu rights, and provided the colony with legal cover to apply overwhelming force against the insurgency. Specific powers sanctioned by the regulations included the authority to establish

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<sup>87</sup> Clayton, 21.

curfews, restrict civilian population movement, conduct mass arrests, and the power to detain arrestees without trial.<sup>88</sup> The emergency regulations also established security zones within central Kenya. This provision of the regulations authorized the establishment of prohibited areas, where security forces could apply deadly force at will, and special areas, where security forces could apply deadly force if those challenged failed to comply with the challenge.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, the colonial administration designated all forest regions as prohibited areas and all settled areas, specifically the White Highlands, the Kikuyu Reserves, and Nairobi, as special areas. British security forces used these zone designations to restrict movement and deny sanctuary to militant gangs. In addition to the decapitation effort and the broadening of emergency powers, the colonial administration used population control methods and collective punishment to contain the resistance. The colony controlled population movement using checkpoints, curfews, and mandating all Kikuyu carry identification cards. This method, known as the passbook system, had great effect in Nairobi after Operational Anvil where colonial police applied it to control the freedom of movement of those Kikuyu not detained during the operation.<sup>90</sup> Collective punishment was a form of coercion the British applied against the Kikuyu to increase the societal costs for aiding or harboring militants. Specific forms of collective punishment included property confiscation, fines, and eviction.<sup>91</sup>

The second most critical line of effort was *isolating the civilian population*. Like the first line of effort, the colonial administration—vice the military—was primarily responsible for objectives designed to isolate the population from insurgents. The goal of this line of effort was

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<sup>88</sup> French, 112-113.

<sup>89</sup> Jackson, 106-107.

<sup>90</sup> “Kenya Suspects Graded: Rehabilitation Plan,” *The Times*, 10 May 1954.

<sup>91</sup> Bennett, 219-222.



twofold: to shield loyal subjects from violence and intimidation, and to prevent insurgents from interacting with their support base among passive wing sympathizers. The colonial authorities achieved this goal by implementing a number of security initiatives that worked in concert to segregate the various elements of society cohabitating within central Kenya. The civilian population in central Kenya consisted of both European settlers and Kikuyu tribespeople during the Emergency. In general, colonial security organizations defended the areas settled by Europeans (the White Highlands) while loyalist Kikuyu serving in the Home Guard defended the tribal reserve areas. The colonial government evicted most Kikuyu residing within the White Highlands in late 1952.<sup>92</sup> This objective protected the Europeans from insurgent attacks and Kikuyu squatters from settler reprisals. The Kikuyu population comprised both loyalists and passive wing adherents to the Mau Mau cause. The inability of security forces to distinguish between the two forced the British to adopt a policy of forced resettlement. The colonial government copied this policy, also known as villagization, from the counterinsurgency response in Malaya where the British Army implemented a similar initiative with successful results.<sup>93</sup> The advent of villagization compelled a second security objective, the enlargement of the Home Guard volunteer force. The Home Guard was essentially an anti-Mau Mau resistance organization recruited in part to augment the overstretched colonial police and in part to give a Kikuyu face to the war. While the Home Guard served a crucial purpose, corruption and barbarism forced the British to disband the organization in 1955.<sup>94</sup> The final security objective that enabled the British to isolate the population was the large-scale detention of suspected fighters and supporters.

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<sup>92</sup> Colin P. Clarke, Molly Dunigan, Beth Grill, and Christopher Paul, *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2013), 67.

<sup>93</sup> Newsinger, 74.

<sup>94</sup> Anderson, 270-271.

Debate exists on the true number of detainees confined during the war, but historian Caroline Elkins estimates at least 160,000 Africans—and possibly as many as 320,000—spent time in prison camps.<sup>95</sup>

The third line of effort devised by British authorities was a *political development* program. The goal of this line of effort was to improve the economic and political prospects of the Kikuyu in order to provide an alternative to armed rebellion. Again, the colonial government was responsible for this line of effort. The British pursued this goal through a number of objectives including land law reform, developing infrastructure, amnesty programs, and political reform. The colonial government attempted to address Kikuyu grievance's over land dispossession through the Swynnerton Plan. This plan, named in honor of Colonial Secretary Swynnerton, expanded private land ownership and ended the colonial practice of restricting African farmers from growing certain types of crops.<sup>96</sup> Next, the colonial government developed infrastructure including schools, medical centers, and athletic centers in an attempt to reduce discord generated by forced resettlement.<sup>97</sup> To encourage reconciliation, the colony offered several amnesty programs, the most successful of which yielded the surrender of more than eight-hundred insurgents.<sup>98</sup> Finally, the colonial government amended its constitution to improve the political standing of Kenya's African population. The new constitution permitted Africans to contest Legislative Council elections and permitted parties to contest local elections.<sup>99</sup> Attempts

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<sup>95</sup> Elkins, xiii.

<sup>96</sup> Branch, 120-121.

<sup>97</sup> Arthur Campbell, *Guerillas: A History and Analysis* (New York: John Day Company, 1968), 218.

<sup>98</sup> Dewar, 56.

<sup>99</sup> The Legislative Council was the administrative body that established policy in Kenya while it was a British Colony. See Anderson, 333.

to improve the political standing of Kenya's African population were largely superficial and did little to dismantle the settler dominated political order in Kenya. Reform initiatives did however help British propaganda efforts in undermining the insurgent narrative that violence was the only means to political reform.

Erskine and Baring's final line of effort focused on *optimizing operational cohesiveness* among the joint military-civilian security forces. The goal of this line of effort was to synchronize security efforts between the various security organizations fighting to stabilize Kenya. This line of effort was a joint political/military program. The colony achieved this goal by augmenting formations with Kikuyu guides, creating doctrine, establishing a school to train counter-guerilla tactics, and by improving intelligence. Loyalist guides who had familiarity with the terrain and spoke the native language augmented regular army and Kings African Rifle battalions to enhance the effectiveness of British formations.<sup>100</sup> The War Office optimized operations by compiling and distributing *A Handbook On anti-Mau Mau Operations* in 1954.<sup>101</sup> This pamphlet captured tactical doctrine relevant to the war in Kenya including passages on how to conduct ambushes, sweeps, and patrols in forest terrain. Forest war doctrine was essential because the War Office did not properly train or equip British units to fight in forest highland climes.<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, units arriving in Kenya had to acclimatize and learn. It was for this reason the British Army established a forest warfare school in central Kenya.<sup>103</sup> Finally, improved intelligence collection and analysis optimized operations. While a police intelligence capability predated the Emergency, military

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<sup>100</sup> Clayton, 27.

<sup>101</sup> War Office, *A Handbook on Anti-Mau Mau Operations* (1954; repr., St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2006).

<sup>102</sup> Clayton, 22.

<sup>103</sup> Bennett, 26-27.

commanders struggled to generate combat intelligence about the Mau Mau forces. Erskine overcame this shortfall by establishing tactical intelligence offices at the provincial and district levels.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, military intelligence units developed methods to infiltrate insurgent gangs to collect targeting information.<sup>105</sup>

In summary, a string of high-profile attacks, including the Lari Massacre, forced British officials in London and Nairobi to develop a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. British officials founded the strategy that emerged in 1953 on five intermediate objectives: contain the resistance, isolate the civilian population, destroy the insurgent gangs, implement political reforms, and optimize security operations. British planners in Kenya used these objectives as the basis for an operational approach designed to meet policy end states dictated from London.

The operational approach included one central line of operation—destroying the Mau Mau gangs. This objective was the colony’s decisive effort and the British Army was responsible for planning and executing operations to achieve it. The remaining intermediate objectives were supporting lines of effort. In general, the colonial government was responsible for managing the supporting lines of effort. While British Army operations did successfully locate and destroy the roving insurgent gangs by 1956, ultimate success against the rebel movement was a function of political repression including the detention of hundreds of thousands of Kikuyu. The decision to detain large percentages of the Kikuyu population had negative effects on both the Kikuyu people and the war effort. The next section of this monograph explores the undesired effects of Britain’s political operations.

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<sup>104</sup> Erskine, 18-19.

<sup>105</sup> Newsinger, 75.

### Undesired Effects

The Lari Massacre was a catalyst that forced British authorities to refocus resources and energy on events in Kenya. The brutality and scale of killing that occurred during the Lari Massacre also solidified opinions and substantiated narratives about the nature of those Kikuyu affiliated with the insurgent movement. From that point forward, colonial officials and the settler community judged Mau Mau adherents mentally ill, subhuman, and predatory.<sup>106</sup> The events at Lari, and a string of other high-profile insurgent attacks on white settlers, created a panic and further biased opinion against the Kikuyu as a people. The emerging narrative held that unhuman Mau Mau beasts threatened both the white and African populations, and that taking extreme measures to eliminate the threat was necessary. Ultimately, belief in this narrative, and “virulent racism,” permitted colonial officials to justify a counterinsurgent response that incorporated disproportionate force and systematic repression.<sup>107</sup>

Counter-Mau Mau repression manifested itself in a number of ways, but none more pivotal than the forced detainment of the Kikuyu population.<sup>108</sup> Detainment occurred in two forms. First, the colonial government isolated large numbers of insurgent fighters and supporters in detainment camps where torture and squalor were commonplace.<sup>109</sup> Second, the colonial government essentially detained the remaining Kikuyu population by resettling them to fortified villages patrolled by loyalist Home Guard militiamen. According to historian Caroline Elkins, the villages were “detention camps in all but name.”<sup>110</sup> Isolating the enemy population enabled a

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<sup>106</sup> Anderson, 279-284; Elkins, 46-48; Brendon, 566-567.

<sup>107</sup> Elkins, 152.

<sup>108</sup> Debate continues on actual numbers but a recent estimate indicates the number of Kikuyu interned in detention camps likely ranged between 160,000 and 320,000. See Elkins, xiii.

<sup>109</sup> Anderson, 317-323.

<sup>110</sup> Elkins, xiv.

relatively quick and overwhelming victory. Victory, however, came at a great price—systematically repressing an entire ethnic group. Thus, the British response to the rebellion was ineffective morally, militarily, and politically in terms of undesired effects because although the British succeeded in destroying the insurgency, their campaign relied on highly repressive measures that violated long established *jus in bello* principles, setback operations at the tactical level, and ultimately accelerated independence. Accordingly, reliance on repression—including mass detention and the disproportional use of force—had short- and long-term consequences for both the British and the Kikuyu. This section explores the undesired effects that resulted from British political decisions to apply overwhelming force against the Mau Mau and their support base within the Kikuyu community.

While Erskine and Baring arranged operations and lines of operation/lines of effort that succeeded in ending the insurgency, they failed to anticipate the undesired effects of employing repression and disproportionate force. In *The Strategy of the Indirect Approach*, Liddell Hart observed:

The end must be proportioned to the total means, and the means used in gaining each intermediate end which contributes to the ultimate (end) must be proportioned to the value and needs of that intermediate end—whether it be to gain an objective or to fill a contributory purpose. An excess may be as harmful as a deficiency.<sup>111</sup>

Liddell Hart also warned that brutality embitters opponents and hardens resistance.<sup>112</sup> Taken together, these admonitions suggest undesired effects are likely to result from applying overwhelming force in war. British officials in Kenya, including Erskine and Baring, neglected to embrace Liddell Hart's warnings, and paid accordingly.

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<sup>111</sup> Liddell Hart, 188-189.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 207.

The British also failed to embrace long-standing notions of just war theory. *Jus in bello* traditions maintain two fundamental propositions. First, military commanders and political leaders must ensure casualties induced, and means applied, are proportionate to the objective.<sup>113</sup> Second, military and political leaders must ensure security organizations do not apply force against non-combatants—regardless of whether those non-combatants are civilians or prisoners of war.<sup>114</sup> On both counts, the British were derelict. The British violated the principle of proportionality in at least two instances. First, when the colony used modern infantry weapons, motorized transportation, and air power against insurgents armed only with knives.<sup>115</sup> Second, when the colonial administration authorized and oversaw the long-term detention of hundreds of thousands of suspected insurgents. The British violated the principle of non-combatant immunity when colonial surrogates and agents subjected detainees to torture. The British response to the rebellion incorporated methods that violated *jus in bello* theory. Therefore, the British were morally culpable for human rights abuses that occurred during the Emergency.

The undesired effects of the colonial government's use of repressive measures and overwhelming force also engendered short-term consequences that ran against British interests. Three such consequences illustrate how embracing repression produced counterproductive effects at the tactical level. First, the emergency regulations passed by the colonial government, and authorized by the Colonial Office, prohibited all forms of political protest.<sup>116</sup> This provision was myopic because it effectively ended the ability of fence-sitting Kikuyu to express political

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<sup>113</sup> David Fisher, *Morality and War: Can War be Justified in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64-77.

<sup>114</sup> Fisher, 77-78.

<sup>115</sup> While the exact number is unknown, as many as twenty thousand Mau Mau lost their lives during the Emergency. Conversely, the Mau Mau killed thirty-two Europeans. See Brendon, 567.

<sup>116</sup> John Springhall, *Decolonization since 1945* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 161.

dissatisfaction through civil disobedience. Removing lawful forms of protest ultimately resulted in the undesired effect of alienating the faction of Kikuyu who initially avoided formal association with the Mau Mau movement. Wholesale political condemnation of the Kikuyu, in combination with overwhelming violence, operated to drive loyal Kikuyu to the insurgency.

A second factor that yielded undesired effects was the decision to deputize and arm the Kikuyu Home Guard. In theory, this initiative was sound because it promised to take operational pressure off regular army formations and because it put an African face on the counterinsurgency mission. In practice however, introducing a home guard force was disastrous. This was because the Kikuyu Home Guard grew into an interest group that had tremendous power over the non-combatant civilian Kikuyu. While some Home Guard volunteers likely performed their responsibilities with distinction, the organization became synonymous with abuse of power, corruption, and brutality. Home Guard volunteers were complicit in extortion and bribery in Nairobi where the colonial administration used them to augment the police.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, Home Guard volunteers looted the homesteads of Kikuyu villagers who the colony forcibly transferred to new abodes during the resettlement program.<sup>118</sup> The British also employed the Home Guard as constables within the newly constructed villages where the volunteers frequently took liberties with the property and wives of rival tribesmen.<sup>119</sup> Finally, the British used the Home Guard to augment regular and auxiliary military formations where they served as guides and translators. In this capacity, the volunteers inflicted violence against non-compliant suspects during tactical interrogations in the field.<sup>120</sup> Home Guard corruption and brutality thus aggravated

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<sup>117</sup> Anderson, 201.

<sup>118</sup> Brendon, 564.

<sup>119</sup> Lawrence James, *Imperial Rearguard: Wars of Empire, 1919-85* (New York: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988), 185-186.

<sup>120</sup> Branch, 81-82.



ever-increasing cycles of violence among the Kikuyu during the rebellion. While the Home Guard provided the benefit of an inexpensive labor pool for imperial dirty work, the decision to deputize untrained and ill-disciplined volunteers backfired.

A third example of how British repression provoked undesired effects played out early in the conflict when the colonial administration evicted loyal Kikuyu from the White Highland areas. Between November 1952 and May 1953, the British removed one hundred thousand from the White Highlands to tribal reserve areas alienating them forever.<sup>121</sup> Before the deportations, Kikuyu resided within the European areas where settlers employed them for domestic and agricultural purposes. The eviction policy thus robbed one hundred thousand Kikuyu, approximately seven percent of the total tribal population, of both home and livelihood. With this decision, the colonial administration unnecessarily reinforced the insurgent ranks with a literal army of supporters who would otherwise have remained within the loyalist camp. Ultimately, the decision to evict all Kikuyu from the White Highlands was an aspect of the colony's larger collective punishment initiative that had the undesired effect of radicalizing the displaced Kikuyu tribesman.<sup>122</sup>

Repression and disproportionate force also produced long-term consequences for the British and for the European settlers that colonized Kenya. Two examples warrant consideration. First, the counterinsurgency effort, a war ostensibly waged to reestablish British political and economic control over central Kenya, unleashed forces that accelerated Kenyan independence. In March 1959, a prisoner abuse scandal changed opinions at the British Colonial Office about the continued viability of the colonial experiment in Kenya.<sup>123</sup> The scandal in question was the Hola

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<sup>121</sup> Elkins, 57.

<sup>122</sup> Bennet, 14.

<sup>123</sup> Brendon, 570.

Massacre, so called because it involved the murder of eleven detainees imprisoned at the Hola detention facility in eastern Kenya. British officials at Hola tried to cover up the incident but news soon leaked causing a political backlash in both Kenya and Britain. Details of the event were damning. The victims were defenseless prisoners who refused to comply with demands that they engage in physical labor. When the prisoners refused to work, the camp commandant ordered guards armed with police clubs to attack the prisoners.<sup>124</sup> The guards injured dozens in addition to the eleven who perished. The Hola Massacre was a decisive point in the war because it triggered Parliamentary scrutiny of misconduct in Kenya. The event also convinced Secretary of State for the Colonies, Iain Macleod, that Britain “could no longer continue with the old methods of government in Africa” and that henceforth, the Colonial Office must “move towards African independence.”<sup>125</sup> Macleod released the remaining prisoners soon after the incident. Included in those released was Jomo Kenyatta, an influential Kikuyu leader held as a political prisoner since 1952. Kenyatta and a select few Kikuyu nationalists coalesced to represent the Kenyan independence movement. Negotiations began in 1960. In December 1963, Kenya achieved independence with the former prisoner serving as the nation’s first president. The second long-term consequence of Britain’s decision to use repressive measures during the Emergency involves the toll the counterinsurgency campaign took on British prestige. The undesired effects of this specific consequence are political in nature. While some British abuses, including the Hola Massacre, were matters of public knowledge during the war, culpability for the repression remained uncorroborated until 2011 when the Foreign Office released a trove of official documents incriminating the British Government.<sup>126</sup> These documents, and interviews

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<sup>124</sup> Anderson, 346-347.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ben Macintyre, “Archive Release Comes After Times Story,” *The Times*, 18 April 2011.

conducted by modern Africa scholars including Caroline Elkins, substantiated allegations of what can only be termed British war crimes. Relying on this newly discovered evidence, lawyers representing surviving victims of British repression presented a lawsuit to the British High Court seeking damages for torture and other forms of maltreatment. The suit was successful. In June 2013, the High Court awarded the victims 19.9 million pounds in reparations.<sup>127</sup> The ruling also prompted British Foreign Secretary William Hague to issue an apology to the victims. Ultimately, the response to the rebellion blighted the history of Britain's colonial involvement in Kenya and East Africa. While the British did much to modernize Kenya, the legacy of repression orchestrated by colonial leaders during the war will forever overshadow what good imperialism achieved.

When confronted with rebellion in 1952, the colonial government of Kenya implemented a response deemed proportional and necessary at the time. It had a responsibility to protect all colonial subjects—European and African—from insurgents who unleashed a terror campaign to achieve their political goals. Proportional force was necessary and appropriate to counter the threat to peace posed by the insurgents. However, after the Lari Massacre, narratives developed that enabled a vastly disproportionate response to creep into British policy. The British thus employed excess force in several different ways. In doing so, they ignored just war theory and established principles on the legitimate use of force in war. British excesses contributed to a decisive victory over the insurgency, but at great moral, military, and political costs to the colony and to the nation of Britain.

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<sup>127</sup> Ben Macintyre and Tristan McConnell, "Mau Mau Torture Victims Celebrate £19.9 Million Payout with More Claims in Pipeline," *The Times*, 7 June 2013.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this monograph was to analyze the effectiveness of Britain's response to the Mau Mau Rebellion. Clearly, the British were effective in terms of destroying the insurgent movement because it ceased to operate as a cohesive organization by late 1956. Colonial officials—both military and civilian—destroyed the movement by arranging operations that isolated insurgent fighters from their support base amongst the Kikuyu population. The British isolated the insurgency by conducting military and political operations arranged both sequentially and simultaneously. Planners and officials organized the counterinsurgency along one central line of operation: destroying the insurgent gangs. The British supported this central line of operation with four complimentary lines of effort: containing the resistance, isolating the civilian population, implementing political reforms, and optimizing joint security operations. While leaders in Kenya demonstrated the capacity to plan, arrange, and execute competent security operations, success against the insurgency was only possible because the British applied a program of politically sanctioned repression. The principal repressive technique used during the war was mass detention. Detention took two forms, internment and villagization. Internment involved the incarceration of known and suspected insurgents in a network of detention camps managed by the colonial government. Villagization involved sequestering the majority of Kikuyu civilians in villages ringed with barbed wire and guarded by Home Guard volunteers. While nominally free, the civilians accommodated within these villages were essentially prisoners because the colonial administration denied them most freedoms. Recent research and government document disclosures confirm torture was also a common element of life for Kikuyu in both detention camps and the guarded villages. Repression enabled the British to suppress the insurrection but at great cost. The decision to use repressive tactics increased Kikuyu sympathy for the Mau Mau movement and ultimately accelerated Kenyan independence. Consequently, an objective review of events in Kenya during the rebellion yields the conclusion that British

counterinsurgency efforts were successful in terms of arranging operations and lines of operation/lines of effort, but unsuccessful morally, militarily, and politically, in terms of undesired effects.

Kikuyu supporters of the Mau Mau Rebellion failed at the tactical level of war for several reasons. Mau Mau leaders established the movement to violently overthrow colonial rule but the insurgency was too poorly equipped, led, and organized to achieve an objective of this magnitude. Leadership devolved to untrained fighters at the local level after the British successfully decapitated the movement's suspected founders in 1952. Thereafter, technologically superior colonial security force units outmanned and outgunned the insurgency. Militants were wholly dependent on succor provided from their passive wing of supporters living among the Kikuyu people. Once the British isolated the militant wing from the passive wing, Insurgent fighters had to spend the majority of their time and energy gathering food and avoiding colonial patrols, as opposed to conducting insurgency operations against British interests. Although the insurgents were highly motivated in their political aim, they could not match the British militarily. Consequently, the colonial government extinguished the movement shortly after Britain mobilized leadership and marshalled resources to fight the insurgency.

While the insurgency failed at the tactical level, Britain's program of repression unleashed forces that allowed Kenyan nationalists to prevail at the strategic level. At its most fundamental level, the British fought the war to preserve an unsustainable political arrangement in Kenya. This arrangement aimed to maintain a system where a small minority of Kenya's population—the European settlers—dominated the colony's economic and political fortunes. By definition, this arrangement required suppressing the interests of the colony's indigenous tribes—a constituency that vastly outnumbered the small European faction ruling Kenya. Left to their own devices, the colonial government of Kenya would have managed the war to reestablish the apartheid arrangement that existed before the Kikuyu rebelled. The colonial government,

however, required London's assistance to defeat the insurgency. British leaders deployed to Kenya to assist the colonial government, including Erskine, recognized that only a rebalancing of political power within the colony would ensure a long-term end to the conflict.<sup>128</sup> At first, political reforms were modest, even superficial. Nevertheless, political reforms mandated by the Colonial Office gave African Kenyans a voice that provided an alternative to violence. Labor Party sympathizers in Parliament amplified nationalist voices in Kenya after news of wide-scale repression entered the public consciousness in Britain.<sup>129</sup> Ultimately, the cost of war, both morally and financially, forced Britain to accelerate independence. The colonial government, spurred on by national leadership in London, released the remaining Mau Mau prisoners in 1958. A small cadre of moderate nationalists soon coalesced to negotiate further concessions. Kenya achieved its independence in 1963, eleven years after the rebellion commenced. British imperialists defeated an indigenous political insurrection, but lost the colony in the process.

What can students of operational planning and counterinsurgency learn from this study? The Mau Mau war is not a particularly apt example of a successful counterinsurgency to emulate because of the role systematic repression played in the war's outcome.<sup>130</sup> Much like Roger Trinquier's torture-embracing approach to counterinsurgency, the British use of mass detention and resettlement in Kenya is not a politically acceptable option for most countries in the twenty-first century.<sup>131</sup> A few lessons, however, do exist for those interested in campaign planning at the operational level of war. One obvious lesson is that applying overwhelming violence is not an effective way to win over the population. As the evidence in this monograph makes clear,

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<sup>128</sup> Erskine, 20.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 275-310.

<sup>130</sup> Clarke et al., 65.

<sup>131</sup> Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 20-23, 48.

overwhelming force and repression produced short- and long-term consequences for the British in their quest to control Kenya. The Mau Mau Rebellion thus stands for the proposition that a counterinsurgency force is better off winning the loyalty of an indigenous population by providing security and opportunity than by applying coercive force and retribution. A second lesson involves civil-military relations. The colonial government's counterinsurgent efforts were inefficient until Erskine recommended reforming the command and control apparatus that managed the colony's security forces. What emerged was a small war council that consisted of only a few members including Erskine, the commander-in-chief of security forces, and Baring, the colony's chief executive. Clear lanes of responsibility and well-defined authorities thus enabled a cohesive unity of effort that allowed the colonial government to optimize the time and resources allotted to it. A final lesson worth commentary involves the limitations associated with deputizing indigenous auxiliaries. While organizing a contingent of volunteer guards was an inexpensive way to bolster security force end strength, deputizing an untrained, poorly disciplined army had very real costs for both the colony and for civilian Kikuyu. The experiment with the Home Guard taught the British that appointing and arming ostensibly loyal Kikuyu men was tantamount to choosing winners and losers in the civil war that engulfed the Kikuyu tribe during the rebellion. Ultimately, colonial officials learned they were better off retaining a smaller force of paid and trained Kikuyu police, than managing an inexpensive, but corrupt, Home Guard force.

This monograph aims to persuade readers that the effectiveness of Britain's response to the Mau Mau Rebellion yielded mixed outcomes. Colonial leaders arranged operations well and designed successful lines of operation/lines of operation. Although leaders planned a campaign that succeeded in destroying the insurgent movement, a series of undesired effects resulted because the colonial government applied overwhelming force and repression against the Kikuyu people. These concepts—arranging operations, lines of operation/lines of effort, and undesired effects—are explicit in modern doctrine. Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*,

categorizes these concepts within its Elements of Operational Design framework. According to

*Joint Operation Planning:*

Operational design employs various elements to develop and refine the commander's operational approach. These conceptual tools help commanders and their staffs think through the challenges of understanding the operational environment, defining the problem, and developing this approach, which guides planning and shapes the concept of operations.<sup>132</sup>

The Elements of Operational Design are essentially heuristics that help planners and commanders to properly analyze the environment, problems, and potential solutions. Clearly, British military and political officers who planned the counter-Mau Mau campaign did not think in terms of operational design or the elements of design prescribed in modern US joint doctrine.

Nevertheless, analyzing Britain's response to the rebellion through an Elements of Operational Design lens has utility. First, planners can use this framework as a tool to analyze past conflicts, to assess the effectiveness of planning, and to achieve a deeper understanding of the conflict itself because the essence of the design process is learning. Second, analyzing the Mau Mau Rebellion—or any campaign—is a technique that planners can use to better appreciate how design heuristics work in practice. Accordingly, thinking about design in the context of the Mau Mau war, and Britain's counterinsurgency response during the war, affords a more complete understanding of both subjects.

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<sup>132</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), III-18.



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